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ABSTRACT

Motivation can be defined as exciting the mind of the student to receive the instruction. Excitement, interest, and enthusiasm toward learning are the primary objectives in motivation. College professors need strategies to reduce student boredom and enhance student motivation. Students will learn what they want to learn and will have difficulty learning material that does not interest them. The understanding of motivational theory centers on the work of the psychologist, Abraham Maslow. Maslow's (1943) view of motivation is based on a hierarchy of needs, structured from the lowest to the highest: (1) basic physiological needs, (2) security and safety, (3) social affiliation, and (4) esteem and self-actualization. College professors need to take these student needs into consideration when planning their motivational strategies. According to J. P. Raffini (1993), unless students have adequately satisfied their biological needs for food, water, sleep, and temperature regulation, it is unlikely that they will become interested in the division of fractions or the rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet. Through teacher-student interaction, college professors can become aware of the physiological needs of the students that are not being met. Strategies particularly applicable to communication courses would include the following: (1) getting to know students personally; (2) using a variety of approaches in the classroom; and (3) helping each student attain some degree of success. (Contains 24 references.) (TB)

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Motivating Students: A Teacher's Challenge

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Abstract

Developing motivated learners is an ongoing struggle for college professors. This essay discusses motivational techniques used in the college classroom in correlation with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Several motivational strategies are suggested in order to satisfy the needs of students and encourage learning. Specific motivational strategies are proposed for a communication course.

Motivating Students: A Teacher's Challenge

Introduction

What does the term "motivation" mean? One technical definition describes motivation as the extent to which certain stimuli, objects, or events effect the occurrence or nonoccurrence of the behavior in question (Usova & Gibson, 1986). More simply, motivation can be defined as exciting the mind of the student to receive the instruction. Excitement, interest, and enthusiasm toward learning are the primary objectives in motivation.

Every year Professor Richards (1987) asks the same question, "How am I going to motivate a group of students who do not want to learn?"(p.65). Student motivation is a major problem in classrooms today. Many students are bored, inattentive, and unable to see much connection between schoolwork and their lives outside classrooms. Their boredom diminishes attention; lowers achievement, and is a likely reason for dropping out of school (Hootstein, 1994).

College professors need strategies to reduce student boredom and enhance student motivation. The purpose of this essay is to provide college instructors

with several strategies to make learning interesting and relevant, and therefore, of value. An additional purpose is to help instructors develop a better understanding of student motivation. In order to motivate students, professors need to know both what is effective and why it is effective.

Motivation Theory

Student learning and memory are closely tied to motivation. Students will learn what they want to learn and will have great difficulty learning material that does not interest them (McKeachie, 1994, p. 349). According to Lehman (1989) motivation is a sum of complex forces influenced by experiences, situations, and environment.

The understanding of motivational theory centers on the work of psychologist, Abraham Maslow. Maslow's (1943) view of motivation is based on a hierarchy of needs, structured from lowest to highest: Basic Physiological Needs, Security and Safety, Social Affiliation, Esteem, and Self-Actualization. A lower-level need must be met before the needs above it can be met.

College professors need to take each of these

needs of their students into consideration when planning motivational strategies.

Physiological Needs

According to Raffini (1993), unless students have adequately satisfied their biological needs for food, water, sleep, and temperature regulation, it is unlikely that they will become interested in the division of fractions or the rhyme scheme of a Shakespearean sonnet (p. 12).

Through teacher-student interaction, college professors can become aware of the physiological needs of the students that are not being met. A minor action such as adjusting the thermostat may help secure the attention of the students. If a student tends to doze off in class, a one on one discussion with the student will let the student know that you noticed and are concerned. Students need to feel that they are not just one of the mob. They need individual attention (Berdeaux & Borden, 1984).

Many college students have jobs and/or families. They have responsibilities competing with education for their time. By learning about each student, their background, their motivation, and their personal

characteristics and capabilities, instructors can become aware of the physiological needs of their students.

Security and Safety

According to Raffini (1993), college students must feel safe from both physical and psychological harm or intimidation before they can focus their attentions on the work of school (p. 12). Anxious or alienated students are unlikely to develop in a chaotic classroom (Brophy, 1986). When instructors resort to screaming, threatening, and ridiculing, students often respond by either withdrawing into themselves or lashing out with vengeance. Students need to be challenged without being intimidated or tricked (Marshall, 1986).

Many college students suffer from the fear of school. It usually stems from a person's unpleasant past experience with school. Students may fear being called on and not knowing the "right" answer and being embarrassed in front of peers, being ridiculed by a professor or classmates. This fear stems from the inability to perform at the same level or pace as the rest of the class, taking tests, and a host of other situations.

The college professor plays an important role in creating a supportive environment in which the security and safety needs of the students are met. Brophy, Rashid, Rohrkemper, and Goldberger (1983) claim that teachers' expressions of belief or attitude about academic activities should tend to develop similar beliefs or attitudes in their students. Therefore, if the instructor is a patient, encouraging person who makes students feel comfortable during academic activities and supports their learning efforts an effective learning environment will result.

Teacher immediacy has a tremendous impact on students' motivation. Frymier (1993) defines teacher immediacy as communication behaviors that enhance physical and psychological closeness with another. Nonverbal immediacy has been operationalized as behaviors such as eye contact, smiling, positive use of gestures, vocal variety, forward body leans, and a relaxed body position. Verbal immediacy has been operationalized as verbal behaviors such as use of personal examples, using "we" and "our," using student's first names, and using humor in class (Frymier, 1993).

Teacher immediacy can help motivate students by meeting their need for security and safety. Verbal and nonverbal immediacy provides communication professors with the opportunity to model the behavior they want their students to exhibit during a speech. It also narrows the distance between the instructor and the student.

Social Affiliation

To avoid feeling isolated or alone, students must develop reciprocal relationships, and they must be able to identify themselves as members of a larger group. Many college students join sororities and fraternities in order to acquire social affiliation. This sense of caring and belonging is often threatened in classrooms where students are forced to compete against each other (Raffini 1993). We all need to feel that we belong and we need to give and receive affection. Every human needs human contact.

Johnson, Johnson, and Scott (1978) claim that liking for teacher and classmates affect the instructional climate of the classroom and student motivation to achieve learning goals. Therefore, college instructors should create a classroom in which

collaborative and cooperative learning take place. Teaching strategies such as group activities, peer tutoring, student-led discussions, and classroom debates help create an environment in which there is interdependence of group members working toward a common goal (McKeachie, 1994).

Another way in which the professor can fulfill the need for social affiliation is to incorporate simulation games, sociodrama, and role playing into the curriculum (Hyman, 1974). By incorporating games as a teaching strategy, the professor builds upon the knowledge and skills the students bring to the teaching situation. Because many college students are older, non-traditional students, they bring a variety of experiences into the classroom. Instructors should relate games to the objective currently being taught. Regardless of age, most college students enjoy the pleasure of playing, the active participation, and the suspense about the outcome of games. Hyman (1974) concludes that motivation increases with games, and since students already have the motivation to play, they will therefore learn, since learning is required in order to play and win. By engaging in these types

of activities, students learn competition, cooperation, and empathy. They are recognized as part of a group. In our culture, social recognition is recognized as a dominant source of motivation (Weiner, 1979).

Self-Esteem

According to Raffini (1993), a sense of personal esteem is developed through countless experiences with significant others whose actions and reactions teach us who we are and whether we are worthwhile and valued human beings (p. 13). College professors can make their students feel valued by appreciating and acknowledging their contributions to the classroom experience. During class discussions, teachers can praise a student's comment or question. Instructors who are successful in producing student learning gains tend to have higher expectations and personally acknowledge the contributions of students (Gibson & Dembo, 1984).

Newby (1991) claims that teachers should engage in confidence-building strategies in order to motivate students and build self-esteem. Many times students may not have experienced success as children in school or adults in their work or social life. As a result,

some may feel inadequate and unequipped to learn and compete, imagining that the others are more capable than they (Berdeaux & Borden, 1984). If college professors instill in their students the belief that if they try to do something they will succeed, the effect on performance will be dramatic (Keller, 1983).

Classrooms are public settings, so that failure often means not only personal disappointment but public embarrassment before the peer group (Brophy, 1986). Therefore, instructors should create college classrooms in which fear of failure, test anxiety, and concern about avoiding ambiguity and risk are minimized. Success is a major factor in motivating students.

Self-Actualization

Maslow (1943) describes self-actualization as an intrinsic drive to meet full potential. Armed with a sense of curiosity and creativity and a belief in our own worth, each of us is inextricably involved in a lifelong process of striving to reach and understand all that exists in our world of experience (Raffini, 1993). Teachers can capitalize on this need in order to facilitate learning and retention.

According to Garcia (1993), academic learning is

intrinsically difficult, requiring concentration, self-regulated behaviors, persistence, cognitive effort and a positive, mastery-oriented outlook. Teachers can help students become mastery-oriented by structuring specific goals in which students will be expected to meet in a class. Goal structure defines which goals students are to accomplish, how students are to be evaluated, and how students are to relate to each other and to the task (Ames & Ames, 1984). By setting goals, students will know exactly what is expected of them and they will know what to work toward in order to achieve success.

Klein and Freitag (1992) claim that students can be taught to utilize self-motivational strategies in order to fulfill the need for self-actualization, in other words, as a means of accomplishing their goals and succeeding. Instructors should challenge students with assignments that are hard enough to require some effort, but easy enough to be completed with no more than a modest amount of assistance (Hoostein, 1994). Professors should also stress the importance of consequences. By setting goals, instructors let students know what they are expected to do and the

consequences of their actions. Bandura (1974) suggests that behavior is pictured as a function of its anticipated consequences. The expectancy that given consequences will follow any behavior and the affective value of those possible consequences are both reasons for success and failure (Nicholls, 1979).

Communication Courses

As a communication instructor, I would like to propose several motivational strategies that may be useful in the communication field, specifically in the basic speech course.

Personalization

In order to create a personal environment, professors should make a point to memorize their student's names and learn as much as possible about their interests and backgrounds. This is a simple, but effective way in which instructors can motivate students. An audience analysis, conducted by the instructor, will help students realize its' importance before, during, and after a speech. The communication instructor can personalize a classroom in a number of other ways. Professors can verbally critique a speech. They can write personalized messages on written

critiques. They can visit with students before and after class about mutual interests.

Variety

When students anticipate different, interesting things happening each class session, they are motivated to attend regularly. Communication instructors have unlimited resources in which to vary activities. After discussing a chapter on persuasion, instructors can divide the class into teams and have them participate in a persuasive debate. Video tapes of prepared speeches can be shown as models and also to help students learn how to critique other speeches. Students can participate in contests or games as a means of reviewing for a test. Students can be divided into groups to discuss certain aspects of a lesson or to brainstorm for topics.

Success

Every student should be able to experience the joy of being successful. It is up to the professor to provide each student with the opportunity to be successful in some area, on some level. Because my basic speech course consists of speeches, tests, and written assignments, every student will excel in at

least one of those areas. My students know exactly what I expect of them, therefore if they do what I ask they will succeed. Even if the overall speech is not exceptional, speech professors can praise certain aspects of the speech on the critique. For example, the organization may have been weak, but the delivery was exceptional. The joy of even a small success can be the encouragement a student needs to want to continue learning.

Conclusion

This essay proposes a variety of teaching strategies that teachers can use in order to motivate students. If teachers and students are going to share a successful classroom experience, it is essential that teachers become aware and understand the needs of their students. Once teachers acknowledge these needs, the motivating techniques are endless. Effective instructors successfully motivate and stimulate student thought and interest and justification for these efforts ground themselves on more and better learning for students (cited in Weimer, 1993, p. 73).

Underlying the educational process, according to Berdeaux and Borden (1984), is the need for teachers to

know their students--their backgrounds and motivations, their personal characteristics and capabilities. Without that knowledge, even the most skilled professor cannot do a fully effective job of teaching.

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